

CITY OF ALTOONA
Blair County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5784

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
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INTRODUCTION

"They Still Love Me In Altoona" is part of the title of George Burns' 1976 autobiography. The phrase refers to a heartening reception given his vaudeville act by the audience at an Altoona theater during the early years of the comedian's career. It was also an appropriate title choice because of the comedic sound of the word Altoona. The city was reputedly named in 1849 by J. Edgar Thomson, then chief engineer of the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR). An assistant engineer later claimed he pointed out to Thomson that generally:

words, in the English language, containing the double "o," had some low signification, as "boohy," "fool," "poltroon," "spooney," etc. ad in finitum whereas the reverse was as signally true of words wherein the single "o" gave the vowel sound, as "nohle," "holy," "glory," "heroic," etc.

He therefore suggested "Altona" instead, but "Mr. Thompson was not the sort of man to change a plan at the suggestion of another, and 'Altoona' remains."¹ In part as a consequence of this unsophisticated sound, the name also served to represent provincial middle America and Burns' long appeal there.

Altoona would have proudly accepted the role of standing for quintessential middle America. In fact, city boosters have long tried to place it in that role, describing Altoona as a place "where there is neither the very rich nor the very poor." The city was founded in 1849 as the site of the PRR's main locomotive and car repair and building shops. By the end of the century, the shops were "the largest of their kind in the world."² They provided the basis for the good life in Altoona, and the size and reputation for excellence of both the shops and the PRR seemed to Altoonans to lend this life a world-class distinction and importance:

Altoona being a railway town, is a city where extreme moneyed aristocracy have found no resting place. The only prestige is that of skillful labor. No drones are allowed; the drill and discipline necessary for the production of such marvels of machinery, such powerful engines, such elegant cars as those made here forbid it. The country daily feels the influence and receives a benefit from these skilled artisans, who here enjoy their happy homes, possessing all of those elements necessary for the making and saving [of] money and enjoying life.³

Located in a wide valley on the eastern side of the Allegheny Mountains in central Pennsylvania, Altoona is called the "mountain city."⁴ The city is bisected by the tracks and shops that stretch along the center of the valley, forming the central determinant feature of its landscape (Fig. 1.1). In the past, visitors commented on the contrast of the beautiful mountain setting and the city itself, made unattractive by the railroad's tracks, shops, and pollution.

The houses that are arranged in rows and steps up the hillsides are no longer gray and drab from coal soot,

¹"How Altoona Was Named," The Altoona Tribune (January 27, 1876).

²Official Program: Old Home Week, Altoona and Blair County (August 13-19, 1922), 2. Charles B. Clark, Illustrated Altoona (Altoona, Pa.: Board of Trade, 1895), 128. J. Simpson Africa, History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883), 183.

³Africa, 146.

⁴Africa, 135.

and residents no longer stream by the thousands down to the shops and hack at shift change. The cheerful, clean colors of the houses' paint and siding are evidence of pronounced economic and social changes in Altoona just as their form and arrangement tell of the city's foundations and development.

* * *

*No one who lives in Altoona needs to be told that it is the railroad city. Altoona did not just happen; it did not grow up from a cross-roads village started by chance as did so many other American cities and towns. The railroad did not come to it; the railroad built it.*⁵

In 1849, the Logan Valley in Pennsylvania's Allegheny Mountains was primarily farm and woodlands. The Pennsylvania Main Line Canal crossed the valley's southern end where canal boats began their ascent of the Allegheny summit on the counter-balanced Portage Railroad cars. But a decision made by an association of investors meeting 237 miles away in Philadelphia brought dramatic changes to the quiet valley. On the recommendation of their newly appointed chief engineer, the board of directors of the PRR decided to locate the line of a cross-state railroad through the Logan Valley and to use the Portage Railroad as a temporary connection across the Alleghenies. More important, it also decided to establish the company's main shop complex in the valley. This complex would accommodate the extra "helper" engines needed to get trains over the mountains and would provide maintenance and repair service from this central location for the entire line.

To support the large scale of the repair shops, the company needed workers and a place for them to live, so in 1849 its engineers laid out and named Altoona. The town plan consisted of two halves—one on either side of a thirty-five-acre plot containing the railroad tracks and shops (Fig. 1.2). Five years later, when a continuous PRR track was opened, Altoona had a population of about 2,000 and was incorporated as a borough. By 1870 the citizens numbered 10,618; by 1890, 30,337; and by 1920, 60,331 (Fig. 1.3). The population peaked in 1930 at 82,054. By this time the PRR shop complex had expanded north and south of its original site and covered seventy-five acres. Fifteen thousand Altoonans were PRR employees.⁶ This transformation from "wilderness" to railroad city is the subject of this chapter.

Establishment and Paternalism of the PRR

The Pennsylvania Assembly chartered the PRR in 1846 in response to lobbying by a group of Philadelphia merchants who in turn were motivated by threatened competition from Baltimore for access to western markets. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company (B&O) received permission from the Pennsylvania Assembly in 1846 to build a line from Cumberland, Maryland, to Pittsburgh. In 1847, Philadelphia interests were successful in having the B&O charter revoked, and PRR stockholders elected their first president and board of directors. The PRR's chief engineer, J. Edgar Thomson, was instructed to survey the best route from Harrisburg to Pittsburgh, and by 1852 there was an all-Pennsylvania rail route from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh. In 1854 construction of the Horseshoe Curve, a skillfully engineered length of track bypassing the old Portage Railroad to the Allegheny summit, was completed, and the next stage of construction, "double-tracking" the line to accommodate traffic flow,

⁵"Chief Industry of Railroad City," Altoona Tribune (January 15, 1916), sec. 5, 1.

⁶Altoona Centennial Booklet: Noteworthy Personages and Historical Events, 1849-1949. (Altoona, 1949). J. Simpson Africa, History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883), 135. Charles B. Clark, Illustrated Altoona (Altoona, 1896), 12-3. George A. Wolf, ed., Blair County's First Hundred Years: 1846-1946 (Altoona: The Mirror Press, 1945). J. Elfreth Watkins, History of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, 1846-96 (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Railroad Co., 1896), 3:7. John Paige, A Special History Study: Pennsylvania Railroad Shops and Works, Altoona, Pennsylvania (National Park Service, May 1989), 1-2. U.S. Census.

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was begun.⁷

The ambitions of PRR sponsors and directors were not satisfied with access to the western Pennsylvania border. Just after the Civil War, PRR President Thomson embarked on an expansion program. Between 1869-74 the system grew from 491 miles of track to almost 6,000 miles. When the PRR line reached Chicago in 1869, it represented an investment of more than \$400 million at a time when very few industries had assets exceeding \$1 million. Its organization and management strategies became a model for later large-scale corporations.⁸

The PRR was able to expand its lines so quickly by leasing and purchasing 51 percent interests in local lines across the country, and by concentrating capital investments in directly road-related expenses.⁹ For local communities along the road, these policies and the fact that the PRR's energies as a corporation were dispersed along its lines meant that they did not experience the direct company paternalism common in nineteenth-century single-industry towns. Instead, there was an undeniable dependence on and awareness of the pervasive railroad presence in the community, and a kind of distanced--almost disinterested--paternalism with occasional direct and benevolent instances of railroad sponsorship in the community.

Altoona and John Wright

The PRR built Altoona in the sense that without the railroad company there would have been no city, but it did not literally build the city by supplying a company store and houses as did most companies that needed to create a community and labor supply from scratch. Development of the city itself seems to have been left primarily to informed free enterprise. Shortly after the decision was made to locate car repair shops in the Logan Valley, an agent was sent from Philadelphia to purchase the site for Archibald Wright, a Philadelphia salt merchant. Wright seems to have held the property in name only; much of it was soon deeded to his son, John A. Wright, also of Philadelphia and an early advocate for the PRR charter and a founding member of its board of directors. John Wright graduated from Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, with a degree in civil engineering. His first job was with the engineering firm commissioned by the state to survey the Juniata and Conemaugh valleys and the intervening Allegheny Mountains for a rail route. In 1848 Wright became president of the Freedom Ironworks in Lewistown, Pennsylvania. A year later Lewistown became the PRR's first connection west of Harrisburg.¹⁰

In this early period of his career, Wright worked with another engineer, J. Edgar Thomson. When the PRR was formed, Wright recommended Thomson as chief engineer, and he was hired away from his engineer's post with a Georgia railroad. In some accounts this is an important fact in Altoona's history because "Altoona" is alleged to be an Americanized version of "Allatoona," a word meaning "high land of great worth" in the language of the Cherokee Indians of Georgia. In another version of this attribution, Archibald Wright is credited with naming the town after spending time in Georgia. Still another source claims that Altoona was named after an important

⁷Paige, 3-4. Wolf, 368-71.

⁸Alfred D. Chandler, The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business (Cambridge: Belnap Press of Harvard University, 1977), 151, 154.

⁹William B. Sipes, The Pennsylvania Railroad: Its Origin, Construction, Condition, and Connections (Philadelphia: The Passenger Department, 1875).

¹⁰Thomas Lynch Montgomery, ed. Encyclopedia of Pennsylvania Biography (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1923), 14:85-7. Sipes, 12.

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railway center near Hamhurg in Europe. The Cherokee derivation seems to be the most popular.¹¹

The land Wright purchased in 1849--the David and Susannah Roheson farm--became the core of Altoona. Consisting of 224 acres, it was plotted on a grid plan and was bisected into East and West Altoona by the railroad tracks. The PRR main line ran along what is now 10th Avenue; the branch line to Hollidaysburg angled off from the main line along what is now 9th Avenue. Streets on each side of the town paralleled these two lines, so they do not parallel each other. The original streets (running east-west) and avenues (running north-south) were given feminine names, reportedly after the sweethearts of the engineers gathered to survey the "improvements" in the area. The names were changed to numerals in 1869. Wright donated a thirty-five-acre triangular tract between the tracks to the PRR for its shops, and retained Clement Jaggard to sell the remainder of the property as town lots.¹²

Robeson's neighbors, Andrew Green on the north and William Loudon to the south, saw the good fortune that had befallen him and decided to try their own luck at land speculation. They plotted the towns of Greensburg (comprising the present 7th to 11th streets area) and Loudonsville (between 16th and 18th streets) and also began selling lots. Unfortunately, whether due to competition or simple lack of coordination between Wright and the farmers, the street plans of the three contiguous towns did not coincide so that there is an offset in the avenues where they cross the borders of these original divisions (Fig. 1.4).¹³

John Wright's tenure as a PRR director lasted only from 1847-48, but the board minutes indicate that he continued to act at least occasionally as the company's agent. An item entered July 23, 1851, recorded the receipt of a deed from Wright "for a lot purchased for the house and office of the General Superintendent at Altoona for which he paid \$700 and he desires that amount be passed to his credit."¹⁴ Wright clearly saw no conflict of interest between his advocacy and employment with the PRR and his personal enrichment from these inside contacts. In 1850, knowing that the PRR was planning to build a large hotel in either Altoona or Hollidaysburg, he wrote to the board of directors listing the advantages of the former and the disadvantages of the latter as a site for the hotel. The Altoona site was selected, and in 1853 Wright sold the PRR the block bordered by 10th and 11th avenues and 12th and 13th streets where the hotel was built for \$8,000, only \$3,000 less than his father paid for the entire 224-acre tract.¹⁵ In one instance in the Fourth Ward, Wright built four houses on neighboring lots and sold these to Altoona immigrants, but most of his property was sold as vacant lots. Wright had no problem recouping his investment as Altoona's population grew with people who came to take jobs with the PRR or to find work in the economy that grew up around it.

Logan House

Railroad passengers who disembarked at Altoona were sheltered by an open, iron railway station, "a model of lightness and elegance," and then entered the PRR hotel, the Logan House, a four-story brick Italianate structure opened in 1855 (Fig. 2.5). The PRR built the hotel and then leased it to a private manager; in 1857 it was insured for \$40,000. Heralded as a world-famous luxury hotel, the Logan House gained additional fame as the site of the Loyal War Governors' Conference, September 24, 1862, when governors of the northern states met to declare

¹¹Altoona Mirror (August 6, 1949), 20. Wolf, 26. Tarring S. Davis, ed. A History of Blair County, Pennsylvania (Harrisburg: National Historical Association, Inc., 1931), I:128. "How Altoona Was Named," Altoona Tribune (January 27, 1876).

¹²Africa, 135-38. "The Heart of the Alleghenies," Harper's New Monthly Magazine 62 (August 1883): 327.

¹³Davis, 129. Africa, 147. Sipes, 139.

¹⁴Paige, 129. PRR Directors' Minutes, 1 (7/23/1851): 482.

¹⁵PRR Directors' Minutes 1 (12/1/1850): 355; 2 (5/11/1853): 342. Deed book D/453.

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allegiance to the Union. From time to time the PRR would allocate funds for repairs and improvements to the building, but by 1931 it was considered antiquated and in such disrepair that it was demolished.¹⁶ The Altoona community still feels the loss of the building that had come to represent the city.

Company Housing

The Logan House answered the need for railroad-passenger accommodations, but housing railroad workers in Altoona was another important concern of PRR officials. The car shops had been established in a virtual wilderness and a PRR publication noted that "for years after the railroad shops were put in operation, it was found difficult to keep workmen here. Aside from the liberal wages paid, the place had no attractions." In 1916, one of Altoona's oldest citizens recounted that when he first arrived in the town in 1851, he lived in a "shanty" and slept in a bunk with a mattress of straw. Another resident recalled that one of his first jobs in Altoona was helping to build a PRR boarding house, suggesting that the company made some effort to house its workers.¹⁷ Reverend W. B. Glanding, whose father moved to Altoona to work as a springmaker for the PRR, wrote:

when the Pennsylvania Railroad company located their works in this place it pursued a humane policy. It built dwelling houses for its employees in several sections of the village and permitted the purchaser to pay for his property in easy installments. These were called "Company Houses."¹⁸

Despite Glanding's assertion, the PRR was, in fact, reluctant to provide housing for many of its employees. Another early resident wrote that:

with all its beautiful environment the town was . . . deadly uninteresting and almost squalid. Outside of a dozen or so houses which the railroad built for the officers and higher workmen, the dwellings were makeshift wooden affairs, most of them painted a dull drab unrelieved by any trimming.¹⁹

Herman Haupt, the PRR's Altoona-based superintendent of transportation, acknowledged the housing problem in 1852 and explained the PRR's policy. "It has been considered inexpedient to divert funds of the Company from the legitimate object of their appropriation, in the construction and equipment of the road." Haupt had stressed to PRR President William Patterson "the importance of providing in time suitable accommodations for our operatives at Altoona, but Patterson preferred that housing be funded by 'private capital.'" Haupt decided to provide the private capital himself and formed a joint stock association ("to which I myself was a large contributor") to construct thirty-two houses. When he left Altoona the next year, Haupt requested that the PRR take over the venture, at least to complete the immediate commitment of eight double houses. He again urged that the buildings "are indispensable

¹⁶Pennsylvania Illustrated (Philadelphia, 1874), 16-7. PRR Directors' Minutes 2 (3/30/1853): 324; 2 (4/13/1853): 333; 2 (5/17/1854): 460; 2 (5/31/1854): 464; 3 (9/19/1857): 258; 12 (12/26/1888): 146; 13 (11/14/1894): 495.

¹⁷Sipes, 139. "Robert D. Steel Is Our Oldest Citizen," Altoona Tribune, (January 15, 1916), sec. 5, 13. "John A. Smith Helped Build First House Erected in Altoona," sec. 2, 11.

¹⁸Rev. W. M. B. Glanding, "Eighth Avenue When the City Was a Village," Altoona Tribune (January 15, 1916), sec. 3, 3.

¹⁹Edgar Custer, No Royal Road (New York: H. C. Kinsey & Co., 1937), 2.

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and no transfer of our operations to Altoona can be made until they are erected."²⁰

At most, the PRR owned eleven double houses, including eight on 8th Avenue, probably those Haupt had initiated. The houses were pictured in an 1853 photograph, where they appear to have gable-front roofs and four-bay fronts. Still following the policy of staying out of such investments, the company sold the houses to their employee-occupants in 1859 "on terms advantageous to both parties."²¹ The purchasers included Jacob Szink, a fireman, 1205 8th Ave.; Ambrose Ward, a car inspector, No. 1209; and John Glanding, a blacksmith, No. 1227. Only one of these houses remains, 1121-23 8th Ave., the double house owned by John McCormick, trainmaster, and George W. Hawksworth, foreman of the blacksmith shop. The two-and-a-half-story wood-frame house, now much altered, has a gable-front roof with paired round-arched windows in the gable, and ornamental largeboards (HABS No. PA-5503).²²

Although the PRR soon divested itself of these houses, it did maintain an interest in providing housing for a few persons in upper management. The PRR built an office building and general superintendent's residence in downtown Altoona in 1851-52, at the corner of 11th Avenue and 12th Street. In 1863 it constructed an additional office building on the corner of 12th Avenue and 12th Street which is altered but extant. The chief engineer and division superintendent shared a three-story brick double house, constructed in 1859, on 11th Avenue next door to the office; in 1870 it was turned over to the general superintendent and the superintendent of motive power. Other PRR managers lived on 12th Avenue in the same block. These houses, the superintendent's house, and the office on 11th Avenue were demolished in the early 1920s when the PRR reorganized and moved its administrative offices to Philadelphia and Harrisburg.²³

Despite the PRR's policy of avoiding community investments and entanglements, it was not averse to claiming responsibility and praise for Altoona's "progress." A Company publication of 1875 reported that the PRR:

has displayed a commendable spirit of liberality toward the city of its creation. Its management has been unremitting in endeavors to make the workman comfortable and contented, knowing that the best skilled labor can only in this way be secured and held.²⁴

Mechanics' Library

One of the PRR's "endeavors" was to establish a Mechanics' Library and Reading Room in 1858; but, again, it was local official Herman Haupt who initiated the project. He wrote the directors in June 1853 asking for a contribution and received a \$500 appropriation. The library was open to anyone who paid a small annual fee.

²⁰Watkins, 3:8. Eighth Annual Report of the Directors of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company to the Stockholders, February 3, 1862 (Philadelphia: Crissy & Markley, 1862), 41. Thirteenth Annual Report of the Directors of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company to the Stockholders, February 6, 1860 (Philadelphia: Crissy & Markley, 1852), 64. Herman Haupt to J. Edgar Thomson, Philadelphia, August 3, 1852, Herman Haupt letterbook, 214.

²¹Robert L. Emerson, Allegheny Passage: An Illustrated History of Blair County (Woodland Hills, Calif.: Windsor Publications, 1984), 34. Bird's-Eye View of Altoona, Pa. (Fowler and Bailer, 1872). Thirteenth Annual Report, 45.

²²Deed books: V/585 (No. 1205), R/362 (No. 1209), R/42 (No. 1227), 30/654 (No. 1121), T/257 (No. 1123). J.H. Lant, Blair County Directory for 1870-71 (Altoona: Advance News Co., 1870).

²³PRR Directors' Minutes 1 (1/8/1851): 374; 3 (12/22/1858): 384. Watkins, 3:12. Charles B. Clark, Semi-Centennial History of Blair County (Altoona: 1896), 94. R. L. Polk & Co., R. L. Polk & Co.'s Altoona Directory (Pittsburgh: R. L. Polk & Co., 1900). Tax Assessment Books. Map of the City of Altoona, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: H. E. Kaufmann, 1882). Wolf, 379.

²⁴Sipes, 139.

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Over the years it was housed in several PRR buildings, including the motive power shop, the ticket office, and the Logan House annex.²⁵

The board of directors approved regular donations to support the Mechanics' Library. When it organized as the Altoona Library Association, the board subscribed to \$500 worth of its stock per year with the stipulation that library rules and regulations be subject to the board's approval. In 1885 the contribution was raised to \$1,000; in 1889 to \$2,500. In 1890, the chairman of the Library Association, PRR chemist Charles B. Dudley, wrote to board members informing them of the number of books borrowed by schoolchildren. The board considered the library so important that in 1896 it arranged for plans and estimates to be prepared for a new facility and the next year authorized up to \$100,000 for a new building; construction plans were never followed through, however. Instead, the library was moved to the former Presbyterian Church on 11th Avenue between 12th and 13th streets. In 1898 the board sent the general superintendent at Altoona portraits of two past PRR presidents--George B. Roberts and Thomas A. Scott--to hang in the reading room. The PRR donated the library to the Altoona School District in 1926. The collection formed the basis for the Altoona Public Library.²⁶

Social Organizations

Another PRR-supported institution in Altoona was the Railroad Men's Christian Association organized in 1876, the second of its kind in the nation. Like the YMCA, the Railroad "Y" provided recreational facilities and activities as well as educational programs and materials for members who were PRR employees affiliated with one of the city's "evangelical" churches. Railroad management liked to encourage employees to spend leisure time at the Y as an alternative to saloons and the union halls of the railroad Brotherhoods. In the early twentieth century the PRR deducted \$1 each year from employees' pay as a contribution to the Y. Other groups using the Altoona Y's meeting rooms included the Altoona Works Chorus, Apprentice Club, Welders Society, Retired Workers Association, Shop Bowling League, Middle Division Band, Pennsylvania Railroad Supervising Agents, Pennsylvania Railroad Veterans Association, Pennsylvania Railroad Floral Association, and Railroad Police Officers School.²⁷

These indicate the range and extent of PRR-affiliated social activities in Altoona. The Altoona City Band was another such organization. Formed in 1853, it was

to all intents and purposes a railroad band. The privileges of the players were many and it was of some interest to the musicians to be a member. Concerts were given every week in the Logan House park, at first exclusively for Logan House guests, but later . . . [for the general] population.²⁸

PRR sponsorship of the Altoona Band and of a small brass cannon--fired from the city's hillsides "on all gala occasions" to the delight of local youths--gave the company maximum public relations value for minimal expense. Only rarely did the company contribute to the city without the expectation of a similar payback. In 1863

²⁵PRR Directors' Minutes 2 (6/22/1853):353; 2 (7/7/1853): 362. Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 77-8. K. Virginia Krick, "Libraries," in Wolf, 279.

²⁶PRR Directors' Minutes (10/14/1885): 86; 8 (2/12/1879): 211; (11/2/1885):90; (4/5/1889):209; 14 (4/8/1896): 207; 14 (10/25/1897): 473; 15 (5/20/1898):63. Krick, 279.

²⁷Africa, 169. Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 89. Altoona Mirror (August 6, 1949), 93. Altoona Tribune (January 15, 1916), sec. 4, 5. Shelton Stromquist, A Generation of Boomers: The Pattern of Railroad Labor Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 235. Paige, 85-6.

²⁸"A Musical Review of Blair County," Altoona Tribune (January 15, 1916), sec. 3, 14.

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the PRR directors consented to invest "a reasonable amount" in the stock for the erection of a market house and town hall in Altoona. In 1864 they approved the purchase of \$10,000 in borough bonds. It was stipulated that this money would either be credited toward their borough taxes for two years or would be used in a "Bounty Fund," presumably enabling PRR workers to "avoid the coming draft."²⁹

PRR and Municipal Development

Although the PRR at one time held at least \$50,000 in Altoona city bonds, thus contributing to city improvements, it generally aided city projects only when it had a direct interest in doing so. An October 1856 editorial in the Altoona Tribune praised the railroad for at least providing the borough with a good example.

The Railroad Company has improved the appearance of the avenue in front of the Logan House by laying substantial brick pavement. We hope that our citizens who own property in the town will find it convenient to follow their example in the near future. The old board walks are wearing out and in many localities are dangerous to pedestrians after night.³⁰

Altoona was incorporated as a borough on February 6, 1854. It was administered by a chief burgess and a five-member council. In 1868, Altoona was chartered as a city with a mayor and a twelve-member council (two from each ward). In 1885, the city adopted a bicameral form of government; in 1913 it switched to a commission form.³¹ The various administrations faced the formidable task of establishing municipal services that could keep pace with the increase in population. Facilities for public and private transportation, various utilities, police, and fire companies, schools, and hospitals were the matrix that allowed for successful residential developments and bound new homes and neighborhoods to the urban network.

Street Paving

It took some time before even basic services such as paved streets and sewers were provided, and a number of sources have commented on the consequent appearance of the town. A party of immigrants who arrived looking for work "thought it such a God-forsaken place" that they moved on to Westmoreland County. One resident called the town's early period its "mud age." Even a PRR-sponsored guidebook remarked on Altoona's unattractive appearance:

It is no aspersion upon Altoona to say that, when it first became a town, it was not the most lovely place of residence on the continent. Swamps, marshes, and ponds composed a large portion of its surface, and its streets abounded in mud of the most tenacious kind.³²

Before 1889 Altoona had no permanent street or sidewalk pavement. In 1873 the city was authorized to issue \$150,000 in bonds to underwrite such improvements. Part of this money was used to macadamize the two main commercial streets in the city--on the East Side, 8th Avenue between 9th and 17th streets; 11th Avenue between 11th and 17th streets on the west side. Unfortunately, this material disintegrated after only a few years, and mud

²⁹Glanding, Altoona Tribune (January 15, 1916), sec. 3, 3. PRR Directors' Minutes, 4 (3/4/1863): 283; 4 (3/18/1863): 285; (2/17/1864): 363; (9/7/1864): 404-05.

³⁰PRR Directors' Minutes 6 (9/9/1874): 363. Altoona Tribune (October 16, 1856), reprinted in Altoona Tribune (January 15, 1916), sec. 3, 12.

³¹Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 113. Official Program: Old Home Week, Altoona and Blair County (August 13-19, 1922), 20, 24.

³²J. R. Bingham, "Altoona and the Pennsy in 1867," Altoona Tribune (January 15, 1916), sec. 3, 11. Sipes, 139.

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6 to 12 inches deep sometimes reclaimed 11th Avenue. In 1889 these streets were repaved with asphalt blocks that proved more durable, and gradually several miles of streets were paved. The effort "had the moral support of General Superintendent Frank Sheppard who induced his company to pave several blocks along their property on 11th Avenue and 12th Street." Property owners on 12th Avenue and several along streets on the East Side were inspired by the PRR's work, and sponsored their own paving projects. In 1905 the city floated a loan for more extensive street and sidewalk paving with the provision that the community at large pay one-third of the cost.³³

Sewers

Construction of a sewer system was another concern of the new city government, for "during the village days of Altoona, the sewer system, like the grades, was a law unto itself." An early resident complained that he "was obliged to use a harrel of lime in front of his home [built in 1859 at 1014 Green Ave.] for fifteen years to make the surroundings sanitary." Records indicate that the first sewer line was laid through the main commercial district along 11th Avenue from 13th to 15th streets to 10th Avenue in 1870. The next year a line was constructed through two blocks of the East Side commercial district, 8th Avenue from 9th to 12th streets. The First and Third Wards around the main commercial district were the next priority; a sewer was laid across them zigzagging from 10th Avenue and 9th Street to 14th Avenue and 13th Street. The East Side's Sixth, Fourth, Second and Eighth Wards were served next, receiving lines by 1874.³⁴

By the 1880s the city engineer took a more systematic approach to sewer construction by dividing the city into four districts that conformed to natural drainage areas. The first three, covering the north half of the city, were drained into the Juniata River. A sewer line for the Fourth District, the area on both sides of the city south of 13th and 15th streets, was begun in 1888 but was delayed by injunctions obtained by property owners south of the city who objected to having sewage drain into their streams and springs. In 1891 Peter Good, a farmer two-and-one-half miles from the city limits, was awarded \$5,000 for pollution damages. In 1895 city engineers redesigned the line to discharge on a sandy flat three miles south of the city where they believed "it would be filtered and purified without injury to anyone." The PRR directors approved a loan of up to \$20,000 to the city for the completion of the Fourth District project. The company was interested in seeing the sewer completed because it owned property in South Altoona. City and PRR cooperation was also noted in 1914 when the directors consented to the city building sewer lines on its property near Juniata Borough. The company contributed \$6,896 to the construction and was granted the right to connect to the lines and to the city's new sewer in the Fairview neighborhood and to a new "disposal plant near East Altoona."³⁵

Water

Until 1859 Altoona residents relied on wells and cisterns for their water supply, but that year the Altoona Gas and Water Company began service to the borough. In 1855 the state had granted the borough the sole right to supply its water, but the council could not afford to undertake the project and transferred the right to the Gas and Water Company. Although privately organized, the company was closely affiliated with the PRR. In fact, the PRR owned a significant amount of stock in the company and the PRR directors authorized company President William

³³Altoona Tribune (January 15, 1916), sec. 5, 13; sec. 3, 3, 13. Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 61-2.

³⁴J. N. Tillard, "Our Municipal Development," Altoona Tribune (January 15, 1916), sec. 3, 13. Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 64-74.

³⁵The First District sewer, serving the west side between 7th and 15th streets, was completed in 1893. The Second District line was finished in 1894 and served the East Side from 12th Street north to the city limits. The Third District sewer, also completed in 1894, served the west side area north of 7th Street. Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 69-74. PRR Directors' Minutes 13 (6/22/1892): 158; 23 (12/23/1914): 468.

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H. Wilson to vote on their behalf. In 1858 the council agreed to allow the PRR to lay water lines through the borough and arranged to contract for any water surplus. For a time, Gas and Water Company customers received water brought into the borough by the PRR, and in November 1859 the president of the company petitioned the PRR directors for a loan to complete its works. The PRR granted the request by taking a \$10,000 first mortgage on the company property. Both the PRR and the Altoona Gas and Water Company obtained their water from a reservoir fed by Pottsgrove Run. This stream, across the Pleasant Valley east of town, also powered Pottsgrove Mill and was used by farmers along its length. The PRR employed a crew of black laborers to dig a ditch from the shops to the mill dam. One morning these men arrived at the ditch to find that about twenty men and boys had filled it back in, protesting the obstruction of their farms' water supply. The PRR responded by providing and maintaining a pipeline to each farm.³⁶

The Altoona Gas and Water Company line led to a distributing reservoir on the hill at the corner of 15th Avenue and 12th Street. The pipes were only 4 inches in diameter and the borough soon outgrew their capacity. In 1872 the PRR bought the company's Pottsgrove and 15th Avenue reservoirs for \$33,360, easing its own increasing need for water. The water franchise and the lines in Altoona were sold to the city, which began construction of a larger reservoir at Kittanning Point within the bend of the Horseshoe Curve. A new 3 million gallon storage reservoir was built on Prospect Hill on the city's East Side. A second reservoir at Kittanning Point was completed in 1896. The PRR continued to be involved in the city's efforts to meet the growing demand for water. In November 1887, the PRR directors approved a resolution:

that in order to aid the City of Altoona to secure an increased water supply in which the Pennsylvania Railroad Company is deeply interested, the Treasurer of this Company therefore is authorized to advance from time to time to Wylie and Fraser and other contractors with said City of Altoona a sum . . . not exceeding \$100,000.

In 1897, the directors approved a loan of "up to \$35,000 to the City of Altoona for paving the flood water channel of Kittanning Point Reservoir." These reservoirs, set in a fold of the wooded mountain still serve the city, and are still an impressive sight. As Clifford Clark remarked in 1896, "they are in some respects a work of art and attract the attention of all daylight travelers over the Pennsylvania Railroad."³⁷

Gas

The gasworks of the Altoona Gas and Water Company was located at 11th Avenue between 8th and 9th streets. In 1859 it had the capacity to supply 30,000 cubic feet of illuminating gas each day. By 1883 demand had increased so much that capacity was upgraded to 150,000 feet per day. In the early days of the system, when consumption by PRR shops was high, the East Side of the city was often "poorly lighted." A larger, 6-inch main laid across 12th Street solved this problem, but by 1891 the gas company made plans for a larger modern plant on four-and-one-half acres at 7th Avenue and 1st Street. The new property was purchased from the PRR for \$16,000; in exchange, the gas company tore down its old plant and received \$32,000 for the land from the PRR, which used it to build side tracks and a freight shed.³⁸

³⁶Africa, 154. PRR Directors' Minutes 3 (11/23/1859): 447. "Great Storm That Killed Vegetation," Altoona Tribune (January 15, 1916), sec. 3, 5.

³⁷PRR Directors' Minutes 5 (5/29/1867): 139; 5 (6/28/1871): 466; 5 (5/24/1871): 465; 11 (11/1/1887): 395; 14 (10/27/1897): 470. Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 41-3.

³⁸Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 40. Africa, 155. PRR Directors' Minutes 13 (5/13/1891): 4.

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When the water division of the Altoona Gas and Water Company was sold to the city and PRR in 1872, its name was shortened to the Altoona Gas Company. In the next few years the PRR sold \$55,000 worth of its stock in the company to "reduce [its] floating debt," but retained influence in the company. In October 1875, the directors' meeting minutes recorded that the Altoona Gas Company agreed to grant the PRR a reduction in the price of gas for its Altoona properties, including the Logan House. At the same meeting, the directors recommended that PRR employee J. B. Collin, then mechanical engineer in the Altoona office of motive power, "be allowed to retain his position as President of the Altoona Gas Company with the salary attached thereto." In 1913 the company became the Altoona Gas, Light, and Fuel Company.³⁹

Hospitals

The last two decades of the nineteenth century were prosperous ones for the city, and a number of improvements often linked to the PRR were introduced. The Altoona Hospital, opened in 1886, was founded with a \$15,000 state appropriation and matching local funds, such as \$1,000 from the Altoona Gas Company and \$4,722 from PRR employees. The PRR donated \$7,000 and a four-acre plot on Howard Avenue at 6th and 7th streets for the hospital grounds and continued to make regular donations after the hospital opened. The PRR contributed \$10,000 for an east-wing addition, completed in 1904, and \$3,000 for a nurses' home in 1905.⁴⁰ Mercy Hospital, located in the city's "west end," was chartered in 1909. It was first housed in a private residence at 8th Avenue and 26th Street, and expanded into a new building in 1917.⁴¹

Telephone and Protection Services

Other signs of municipal maturity included Altoona's first telephone exchange, connected, of course, to the PRR shops in 1880. The Edison Electric Illuminating Company began providing the city with electricity in 1886.⁴² In 1894 a patrol wagon was purchased for the city police department. It replaced the wheelbarrows and carts previously used to transport intoxicated and otherwise disabled prisoners. By 1900, the department had a staff of sixteen.⁴³ The city's volunteer fire companies, organized in 1859 with the first city water supply, were replaced with a professional department in 1895.⁴⁴

Streetcar Lines

In 1880 the first street railway, the City Passenger Railway Company, was established. It was originally about three miles long and extended along 11th and 8th avenues. A second street railway, the Altoona and Logan Valley Electric Railway Company (ALVERy), was formed in 1892 to connect Altoona with Hollidaysburg on the south and with Bellwood and Tyrone to the north. The PRR invested \$100,000 in the new company which soon

³⁹Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 40. PRR Directors' Minutes, 6 (9/23/1874): 365; 7 (9/8/1875): 63; 7 (10/13/1875): 81. Altoona Tribune (January 15, 1916), sec.3, 15.

⁴⁰Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 121-2. PRR Directors' Minutes, 10 (9/10/1884): 388, 403, 439; 11 (4/14/1886): 18; 11 (11/24/1886): 260; 12 (3/25/1891): 484; 12 (3/25/1891): 477, 486; 17 (6/24/1903): 287; 17 (5/24/1905): 332.

⁴¹George A. Wolf, "The Mercy Hospital," in Wolf, 415-16.

⁴²Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 40.

⁴³"Altoona Progress Week Suggestions to Speakers and Altoona Progress Facts," (Chamber of Commerce, 1927), typescript.

⁴⁴Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 117-8.

gained a controlling interest in and combined operations with the City Passenger Railway.⁴⁵

The opening of the streetcar lines dramatically altered the local landscape by promoting development and giving residents access to different parts of the city and to towns up to fourteen miles away. Within the city, the streetcar formed a link between its halves, running an essentially circular route around the PRR shops and across the PRR main line tracks. While the PRR made various contributions to the establishment of the city's infrastructure, its expanding shops shaped the city in even more literal ways.

PRR and City Expansion

In 1855, 1,000 PRR employees at Altoona repaired and constructed railway cars, and manufactured iron tracks and parts for locomotives and bridges. By 1869, because of increased demand for locomotive and car repairs during and after the Civil War, the original shop site, extending from 12th to 15th Street between 9th and 10th avenues, was congested with buildings, tracks, and equipment. The PRR purchased additional land in the Logantown section along Chestnut Avenue northeast of 7th Street. Facilities for repair and construction of cars were built on this site, the "Lower Shops." The Locomotive Department, upgraded to build as well as repair locomotives, took over all of the original complex. In 1883, the PRR employed 5,000 men in Altoona, and the shops were described as "the largest of their kind in the world."⁴⁶

PRR business continued to boom and plans for further expansion north of the Lower Shops were begun in 1886. The first Juniata shops for locomotive erection and repair were completed in 1890; by 1916 the complex extended about two miles. In 1903, with 10,000 employees working on the line and at the Juniata and main machine and car shops, the PRR purchased eighty-five acres in South Altoona and built a foundry complex to make iron castings for locomotives and cars. At peak production the foundry produced 900 wheels per day. An oil mixing and testing plant built in conjunction with the foundry supplied petroleum products to the entire PRR system. In the 1920s about 15,000 men worked for the PRR at Altoona, site of "the largest and most important railroad shops not only on the Pennsylvania system, or in all of America, but in the whole world."⁴⁷

For people living in the vicinity of the expanding shops, it was hard to forget that they lived in the railroad city. Smoke and soot covered everything. Whistles calling men to work and the whistle and clamor of trains were heard throughout the neighborhoods. One resident recalled the walk from the train station to her aunt's house, "following the great high board fence that enclosed the railroad yards with all their mysterious, booming, clanking, whistling noises, and seeing the bridges over the yards. . . ."⁴⁸

Track Crossings

Early crossings over the tracks and shops connecting each side of the city were built at 17th and 9th streets.

⁴⁵Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 24-5. PRR Directors' Minutes 13 (4/13/1893): 277; 13 (10/11/1893): 356.

⁴⁶John C. Paige, A Special History Study, Pennsylvania Railroad Shops and Works, Altoona, Pennsylvania (America's Industrial Heritage Project, National Park Service, May 1989), 41. Peter H. Slott, "Pennsylvania Railroad Shops," in "Survey of Historic Structures in Blair and Cambria Counties, Pennsylvania," (Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service: Washington, 1987), draft typescript, 6. "The Heart of the Alleghenies," 327. Africa, 183.

⁴⁷Pennsylvania Railroad Company, Altoona Shops and Motive Power Statistics (Altoona: Office of the General Superintendent of Motive Power, 1890). History of the First Twenty-Five Years of the Work of the Pennsylvania Railroad YMCA of Altoona, Pa. (Altoona Tribune, 1901). Paige, 18, 23. "Chief Industry of Railroad City," Altoona Tribune (January 15, 1916), sec. 5, 1.

⁴⁸Grace K. Ebright, "Seeing a City Grow," Altoona Mirror (August 6, 1949), 9.

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In 1863 the PRR built an iron footbridge at 12th Street, which it replaced in the 1880s. In 1888, a new bridge was erected at 17th Street. The PRR and the city built a vehicular bridge at 7th Street after the PRR closed the wagon crossing at 9th Street in 1886. The PRR approved an agreement with the city in 1888 for construction of an iron pedestrian bridge across the tracks at 9th Street. An 800-foot-long footbridge at 4th Street was also built in the 1880s. It allowed the PRR to close 4th Street to the public and place its car shops in one enclosure. The oldest extant bridge is at 7th Street; opened in 1913 as a double-track trolley and pedestrian structure, it has been converted for automobile use. A city ordinance dated August 12, 1895, prohibited pedestrian traffic on Union Avenue over the Hollidaysburg Branch line at 9th Avenue, provided that the PRR widened a pedestrian culvert under its main line at Union Avenue. In 1911 the PRR built another subway at Union Avenue between 22nd and 23rd streets. One-fourth of the estimated \$7,448 cost was to be contributed by the city.⁴⁹

The bridges and tunnels linking the neighborhoods, shops, and commercial areas were built and shifted as the city grew with the Railroad. The city's population peaked at 82,000 in 1930 at the same time as PRR expansion and employment. The first residents were drawn to the muddy, smoky town by the promise of steady employment. One young man who became a PRR brakeman left Perry County west of Harrisburg with several friends, "having learned of important developments at Altoona." To underline the tenuousness and dependence of the settlement on the PRR, he recounted that in the 1850s he had the opportunity to purchase one side of 11th Avenue between 11th and 12th streets, prime commercial property, but decided against it because of "the uncertainty of the company's activities and the fact that they had bought a big farm near Philadelphia caused some of the officials to be apprehensive that Altoona might be abandoned. . . ."⁵⁰ But the PRR did not abandon Altoona and the hillsides along the tracks filled up with houses and were delineated as wards and neighborhoods (Fig. 1.5).

City Developments

Twelfth Avenue and 12th Street, site of the Logan House, was considered the "hub" of the city. Within a block or two were theaters, banks, department stores, the PRR offices and city hall. In 1890, "some of the finest residences" were located nearby along 12th Avenue between 11th and 16th streets and on 14th Avenue near 11th Street. Broad Avenue from 19th to 27th Street was also one of the "most desirable residence locations" in the city.⁵¹ Although not as upscale as these areas, the First Ward (HABS No. PA-5788), bordering on the north side of the downtown commercial area, was the home of native-born, prosperous professionals and skilled workers who built larger, individualized homes. In contrast, the East Side neighborhood on the slopes of Prospect Hill, encompassed in part by the Fourth Ward (HABS No. PA-5786), became the home of so many German immigrants that it became locally known as "Dutch Hill." While there are some large high-style houses here, the majority are more modest and fall into a limited number of building types that are found across the city.

As lots within the original borough limits filled in, investors platted neighboring developments. Millville, bordering the southern limit of 27th Street, was laid out by Dr. S. C. Baker about 1870. Like much of South Altoona, it was subdivided from ironmaster Elias Baker's property surrounding Allegheny Furnace and his 1846 Greek Revival mansion. S. C. Baker christened the development "Allegheny" but Millville, the name given a smaller adjacent plot, became more popular. The Altoona Rolling Mill, the successor to the antebellum Allegheny

⁴⁹Altoona Mirror (August 4, 1949). C. B. Clark's Altoona City Directory for 1888 (Altoona: Barclay Brothers Sun Steam Printers, 1888). Watkins, 2:222; 3:15, 25. PRR Directors' Minutes, 12 (11/14/1888): 124; 14 (9/11/1895): 114; 21 (11/23/1910): 316; 21 (1/11/1911): 348; 21 (4/12/1911): 485.

⁵⁰"Robert D. Steel Is Our Oldest Citizen," Altoona Tribune (January 15, 1916, sec. 5, 13).

⁵¹Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 5-6. Clark, Clark's Directory for the City of Altoona, Pennsylvania, for the Year 1890 (Altoona: Barclay Brothers Sun Steam Printers, 1890), 51.

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Iron Furnace, provided inspiration for the name.⁵²

Westmont, just west of Millville, was developed by E. H. Flick in the early 1890s. Flick planted shade trees along its streets and commissioned a number of houses from local architects Michael and Louis Beezer. In 1895 Charles B. Clark wrote that Westmont "seems destined to become the most popular suburb of Altoona."⁵³

In contrast to the "quite level" expanse of Millville and Westmont, Fairview was "situated on ground considerably elevated above the central parts of Altoona," hence its name. It was located to the north of 18th Avenue and 11th Street and was noted as the home of "a great many employees of the Pennsylvania Railroad Car Shops."⁵⁴

East Side suburbs included the East End, northeast of 1st Avenue and 1st Street, and Pottsgrove, around the old mill and reservoir on the east side of Pleasant Valley. Collinsville, a village in Pleasant Valley at the southeast extension of 16th Street, was older than Altoona but suffered a decline and was surpassed by the new settlement. Altoonans nicknamed it "Mudtown," a case of "the pot calling the kettle black."⁵⁵

In 1916 Juniata, about one-half mile northeast of the city line, was the second largest borough in Blair County. Like Altoona it also began as farmland, owned by William Loudon, Andrew Kipple, and Robert Hutchison. For a time its post office was named Kipple, but it was Hutchison who first sold acre and half-acre lots to "home-building employees of the Pennsylvania Railroad" in the 1870s. In 1880 the village was called Bellview. In 1889 the PRR began building its new locomotive shops alongside the village and it experienced a boom from the "small army of skilled mechanics" who relocated there. The population was 1,000 in 1893 when the borough was chartered. It became known as Juniata and, according to the U. S. Census, was distinguished as the "third town in rapidity of growth" in the country between 1900 and 1910.⁵⁶

While these nineteenth-century suburbs consisted of smaller lots and half-lots and, for the most part, have a more urban aspect, late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century developments tended to be planned with more generous lots and built up with more suburban house forms. Llyswen (HABS No. PA-5787), south of Logan Boulevard and projected in 1894 as a streetcar suburb, was the most ambitious. As in Westmont, the signature "Llyswen cottage" house form was designed by the Beezer brothers.⁵⁷ Yet, unlike in Westmont, the architect-designed buildings here were commissioned individually.

Eldorado in South Altoona was the name given a post office there some time after the discovery of gold in California in 1848. A carding and fulling mill was established here on Burgoon Run near 58th Street. It was succeeded by an axe and pick factory in the 1830s. By the early twentieth century development around the city had reached south to Eldorado and bungalows appeared amidst the scattering of farm and mill buildings. The streetcar line was extended to 58th Street in 1906. In 1908 the Roselawn Land Company, based in Reading, Pa., purchased the Jacob Buck farm between Highland Park and 58th Street. This subdivision of Eldorado was laid out in building

⁵²Clark, Directory . . . 1890 (1890), 50. Clark, Semi-Centennial, 65.

⁵³Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 7.

⁵⁴Clark, Semi-Centennial, 65. Clark, Directory . . . 1890, 50.

⁵⁵Clark, Semi-Centennial, 66. Clark, Directory . . . 1890, 50. Glanding, Altoona Tribune (January 15, 1916), sec. 3, 3.

⁵⁶"Juniata," Altoona Tribune (January 15, 1916, sec. 5, 5. Clark, Directory . . . 1890, 50. Clark, Semi-Centennial, 66.

⁵⁷Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 9. Clark, Semi-Centennial, 67.

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lots; by 1915 residents had organized the Roselawn Fire Company.⁵⁸

The PRR's construction of the South Altoona shops in 1903 was the spur to development of this area. An investor from Philadelphia who learned of the shop expansion purchased a plot of ground across 6th Avenue just east of the shops from the Baker Estate. Rather than sell lots or build speculative suburban house forms, the developer chose to build a Philadelphia-style row house complex that was named "The Knickerbocker" after its construction company (HABS No. PA-5785). The Knickerbocker was held as a rental property by a series of individuals and small investment companies whose members were primarily Philadelphia businessmen. The owners began to sell the houses, often to their tenants, in the late 1940s and 1950s.⁵⁹ The majority of Knickerbocker residents were listed in city directories as PRR shop employees. A number of Altoona and Logan Valley Electric Railway Company employees made their homes here as well since the streetcar company's shops were only a short walk to the north.

In January 1910 the mayor's year-end report to the city council included a harangue against the absentee Knickerbocker owners. The city had given permission for the PRR to connect a line to its Fourth District sewer in 1903. When the mayor learned that the Knickerbocker Construction Company had tapped into the PRR's line without permission, he sent a crew of men to disconnect it. By 1910 the line had again been illegally tapped and the mayor regarded the action as a

rank injustice to the people who spent their hard-earned money to the amount of over \$100,000 to construct this intercepting sewer and the filtration plant into which the sewer empties. It is a bold and outrageous attempt to get something for nothing. The idea that foreign capitalists, who do not own a dollar's worth of property in our city, would have the impudence and arrogance to drain their houses into our sewer without a penny's cost or saying so much as 'By your leave'!⁶⁰

In contrast to the Knickerbocker in both form and financing was the Locust Hills development bounded by Beale Avenue, Waterloo Road, West Chestnut Avenue, and 36th Street west of the main line in South Altoona. Sponsored by the Blair Home Company which was made up of local businessmen and realtors, it was intended to counter "hungry development" by "giving Altoona a suburb from which no regrets could ever come." In 1921 the company laid out forty-three lots, graded and paved streets and sidewalks, and installed sewer, water, and gas lines. Next, "a 'house factory' was set up" with "every department of building trades" including carpenters, plumbers, and "concrete men" having its own headquarters. By August 1922 sixteen houses were completed. They were of two general types, "the bungalow type and the other of two stories" and were "set in a semi-circle" along each block with the houses at each end nearest the street "so that the continuous front lawn of a block is in the form of a crescent." One of the houses was completely furnished by Altoona's Gahles Department Store as a "sample house."⁶¹

Parks

On the northwest side of the Locust Hills home sites, a parcel of land was set aside for public use as Sand

⁵⁸Fred E. Long, The Eldorado Saga (Altoona: 58th Street United Methodist Church, 1971), 4, 12, 16-7.

⁵⁹Jim Lucas, et al., Project Knickerbocker (University Park, Pa.: American Institute of Architects, 1978). "Big Real Estate Transfer Is Made," Altoona Mirror (August 28, 1924). Philadelphia City Directories.

⁶⁰Altoona Mirror (January 4, 1910), 9.

⁶¹"Locust Hills Is Fine New Suburb," Altoona Mirror (August 3, 1922).

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Pit Park. Planning for public park space was unusual in Altoona, whose original plan did not include a public green. As a result, Fairview cemetery, laid out in 1857, "was long a place of resort, during spring and summer." (Fig. 1.6) Cemeteries owned by individual churches on Prospect Hill opposite Fairview also provided open green space for city residents, but Altoonans still felt the lack of a central city park. In December 1891, Frank Sheppard, general superintendent of the PRR in Altoona, wrote to the general manager in Philadelphia requesting that some vacant PRR property be landscaped and maintained as a park. Like Herman Haupt's request for company-sponsored housing in Altoona, it was the resident PRR official who instigated company action on behalf of the city.

The CITY of ALTOONA now has a population of about 35,000, made up of EMPLOYEES and those indirectly dependent on our interests. As you know, it is closely built up, with no Public Square nor Park of any kind. Perhaps nothing would be of more value, or more appreciated by the community, than advantages of this kind.⁶²

General Manager Pugh forwarded the request to President Roberts and by June 1892 the board of directors authorized the expenditure of \$5,000 for converting the property between Howard and Chestnut avenues at 7th Street. The grounds would be

laid out in walks and beautified, and adapted to temporary use and purpose, of a park, at inconsiderable expense to the company, and thereby contribute, for the time being, to the pleasure and enjoyment of the citizens of the City of Altoona.⁶³

The directors also approved plans for a second park on PRR property bordered by 4th and 5th avenues, Oak and Linden streets in Juniata. The general manager specified that the park should not be

turned over in any manner to the City . . . since the best citizens of the town other than our own people would very much prefer that it remain in our charge rather than that of the City as the park would be liable to misuse and the proper care would not be taken of the property for the reason that the necessary funds could not be obtained.⁶⁴

The PRR's Altoona park property was adjacent to its Cricket Club and Field, formed in 1878 for upper level employees. In the early twentieth century the athletic field, with a stadium capacity of 32,000, became the site of championship playoffs for the PRR system athletic teams. The greenhouses supervised by the PRR's divisional head gardener were also located there.⁶⁵

In 1893 the Altoona and Logan Valley Electric Railway (ALVERy) Company, hoping to capitalize on the need for a local recreation site, built Lakemont Park, a 100-acre amusement park on its line to Hollidaysburg.⁶⁶ It was about this time that a Progressive-spirited movement for local neighborhood playgrounds began in Altoona. A short-lived branch of the National Playground Association was established and several community organizations sponsored playgrounds and lobbied for municipal support of the movement. As a result of their efforts the city

⁶²"Locust Hills," Altoona Mirror (August 3, 1922). F. L. Sheppard to Charles E. Pugh, December 29, 1891, Pa. State Archives, Harrisburg.

⁶³PRR Directors' Minutes (1/27/1892): 97; (6/22/1892): 162; 16 (2/13/1901): 102.

⁶⁴PRR Directors' Minutes 16 (9/24/1902): 481. Charles E. Pugh to G. B. Roberts, January 29, 1892.

⁶⁵Davis, 132. Insurance Maps of Altoona, (New York: Sanborn Map Co.).

⁶⁶Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 130.

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passed Ordinance 1606 in February 1906 establishing Prospect Hill Park. In the 1870s the site was occupied by a smallpox quarantine "pest house" and in the 1880s was quarried for street paving, then used as a public dump. Then just outside the city limits, it was "a favored resort for the rough and rowdy element of the town." A portion of Gospel Hill, in the vicinity of 14th Avenue and 14th Street, was designated as the second municipal park. By 1912 the city had established the position of commissioner of parks and recreation, but local initiative continued to play a more active role. In 1909 parents' associations at the Adams and Penn schools ran adjacent playgrounds. The Concordia Singing Society sponsored one on its grounds in Fairview, and the 16th Street Playground Association sponsored a field at 16th Street and 19th Avenue. These Altoona citizens were inspired by Progressive philosophy articulated in the Altoona Tribune in 1916:

In this industrial age, the playground is becoming as necessary a social-educational institution and adjunct to the public school as the school itself is necessarily a part of the social fabric.⁶⁷

If children were trained early to play well together, they would be more likely to work efficiently together as adults, an especially important consideration in the PRR shops where teams of men were assigned to construct and repair individual cars.

Schools

PRR officials were certainly cognizant of the investment potential of education for their company. In 1905 the PRR donated \$18,000 to the Altoona School Board for equipping woodworking, forge and machine shops in the manual training department of a new high school. Graduates with high grades in the manual training classes were accepted as apprentices in the PRR shops at higher wages than their classmates.⁶⁸ The Altoona school system has enjoyed a good reputation for imparting an up-to-date, quality education to its students. This has been possible in part because of the PRR's sponsorship and contributions to the tax base. Otherwise the PRR's influence in the school system was felt more indirectly as its expansion determined the direction of residential development in the city and the subsequent building of new ward and neighborhood schools.

Until 1870 school construction was concentrated at two sites in the city--one on either side of the PRR tracks. The first construction supervised by the newly elected Altoona School Board was of a two-room school at 7th Avenue and 15th Street in the Fourth Ward in 1854. A west side school was built a year later at 14th Avenue and 13th Street. When Altoona incorporated as a city in 1868, the school district consisted of seven frame school buildings with ten rooms, nine teachers, and 550 students; overcrowding had reached a critical stage and during the next decade six identical, two-story, eight-room brick schools were built across the city. By 1902 each ward had at least one school. There was a total of seven buildings on the east side, five on the west, housing primarily grade school classes. The minority of students who continued their education into high school had no separate building until 1895 when Lincoln High School was opened in the Fourth Ward adjacent to the original 1854 site. Within ten years the school board was forced to commission a larger building designed for 800-900 students. An annex (HABS No. PA-5851) that increased the capacity to 2,500 was completed in 1929. The building then covered the entire Fourth Ward block between 5th and 6th avenues, 14th and 16th streets.⁶⁹

⁶⁷Altoona Mirror (January 15, 1916), sec. 4, 7; "Mr. Taylor Plans Recreation Body," (January 9, 1929); "Council Creates City Park Board," (January 15, 1929). Anna Shaefer Leopold, "Smoky City: A Social Analysis of Unionism in a Railroad Town, 1945-1960" (Master's thesis, University of Chicago, 1962), 21.

⁶⁸"Schools of City Had Lowly Start," Altoona Mirror (June 13, 1945).

⁶⁹"Schools of City Had Lowly Start," Altoona Mirror (June 13, 1934). Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 75. Dr. Levi Gilbert, "Altoona's Educational History Has Been Marked by Countless Steps of Progress," Altoona Mirror, 13 June 1939. Altoona Charter Centennial Booklet.

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The next stage of expansion also incorporated educational reforms through the introduction of the junior high school organization. Two new schools were built in the 1920s--again on either side of the tracks--Theodore Roosevelt Junior High (HABS No. PA-5852) on the east side and D. S. Keith Junior High on the west.⁷⁰ In addition to improving the opportunity for and quality of education the junior highs served the more pragmatic purpose of relieving the continuing problem of overcrowding, exacerbated in the 1920s by annexed territories whose schools had to be integrated into a city-wide system.

City Annexations

Small plots were annexed to the city over its history. The largest block, a 4.57-square-mile area, was annexed in January 1929. It included Wehnwood, Fairlawn, and Juniata to the north; the East End and Collinsville on the east; and the Logan Township developments of Locust Hills, Eldorado, Roselawn, South Altoona, Llyswen, Garden Heights, and Lakemont Terrace to the west and south. The annexation more than doubled the city's size and added 17,000 to its population.⁷¹ Movements for annexation were usually started after it was clear that an area would be successfully developed and that its contribution to the tax base would offset the expense of providing it with city services. Community-based organizations of churches, schools, playgrounds, and volunteer fire companies indicated the success of developments and the solidification of neighborhoods, but the first step in this process was the establishment of individual households--the building and sale of houses.

Housing and Residents

Despite the early difficulty of securing adequate housing, by the late nineteenth century, Altoona city boosters were bragging about its high degree of home-ownership. When he compiled the city directory for 1890, Charles B. Clark concluded that 3,392 families owned their own homes or were in the process of buying, while 3,305 were tenants, putting the home-ownership rate at just over 50 percent. Census reports that year (the first that home-ownership was reported) put the local figure at 45 percent, while the national rate was 47.8 percent. According to the census, home-ownership in Altoona approached 60 percent in 1930, but plummeted during the Depression. Since World War II, home-ownership in the city has ranged between 60 and 70 percent. Today it still runs above the national average--68 percent in 1980 compared to 64.7 percent nationwide.⁷²

Building and Loans

Altoonans financed their homes by forming building and loan associations with names like the Germania and the Workingman's Building and Loan that reflected the composition of their membership. New members were voted in at regular meetings, and each member paid a monthly fixed amount into a fund that became capital, which was then loaned out to finance housing construction. Although the first building and loan associations were "terminal," so that they went out of business when the original loans had been paid, later associations were "serial," or self-perpetuating. The depression of 1873 reduced the capital available for investment for several years. Yet home-building continued in Altoona. One observer estimated that nine-tenths of the money loaned for home building at that time was from building and loan associations. In 1880, an observer noted that

⁷⁰"Schools of City Had Lowly Start," Altoona Mirror (June 13, 1934). Harry G. Good and James D. Teller, A History of American Education (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1973), ch. 8. Altoona Charter Centennial Booklet.

⁷¹"Altoona Doubles Original Area," Altoona Mirror (October 20, 1928). "Great Expansion Record Shown By City Since 1868," (June 13, 1939).

⁷²Altoona (Chamber of Commerce, 1925). Baltimore American, (March 27, 1925). Clark, Clark's Directory (1890). Altoona Mirror (August 6, 1949). Facts About Altoona (Chamber of Commerce, 1948). U.S. Bureau of the Census.

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evidence of the prosperity of the building and loan associations of Altoona are plainly visible. Buildings erected through their instrumentality are located, at short distances, all over the city.⁷³

By 1900 there were thirty-seven building and loan associations operating in Altoona -- an astonishing number when compared to Johnstown, a similar-sized city just forty-five miles away, which had eight. The building and loan associations often assumed the role of banks, so much so that there were only four banks in Altoona at that time. At least one attorney in the city advertised himself as a "Building and Loan Expert." By 1925, Altoona had forty-four building and loan associations. During the Depression forty-seven of fifty building and loans were consolidated to form five state-chartered savings and loans.⁷⁴

Chamber of Commerce and other promotional publications variously described Altoona either as "a city of homes" or as "a one-class city." In effect, the two titles connoted the same thing. The city's many building and loans were credited with earning it the first title; the organizers and members of the building and loans--the steady, middle-class workers who dominated the city's population--gave it the second. The work done in the PRR shops required an unusually large proportion of skilled employees including blacksmiths, hoilermakers, car-builders, carpenters, machinists, pattern-makers, and upholsterers. These people displayed the initiative and thrift attributed to their class by building or purchasing their own homes, often through the aid of the building and loans. The four building and loan associations operating in 1870 were headed by two machinists, a pattern-maker, and an insurance man.⁷⁵ The streetscapes of Altoona's neighborhoods are the precipitate element in this inter-relation of people, work, and class.

Housing

Claiming to have no lower class, Altoona also claimed to have no "lower class" housing. In 1939, the Altoona Mirror flatly denied that the city had any "tenement districts" or slums. Even apartment buildings were few, as the Chamber of Commerce declared in 1925, "the city is distinctly one of homes. There are comparatively few apartments in the city, the Altoona family apparently showing a strong preference for the individual home."⁷⁶ Conversely, the city was not averse to admitting to a few "palatial" homes interspersed with the many modest and respectable ones. One source noted in 1896 that

about three-fourths of the buildings are frame, a few are stone, and the remainder are brick or brick cased; nearly all are neat and comfortable; many are more than this; while not a few are palatial in architectural design and finish, the home of wealth and refinement.

The residential streets in the original city display a stylistic variety of single-family houses, constructed on a one-by-one basis and suited to individual tastes. They are replete with ornamented porches and cornices, differing roof shapes, and a variety of materials. Brick for these structures was manufactured just outside city limits, and stone was quarried nearby. Lumber was brought in by rail, and by 1880 there were three planing mills.⁷⁷

⁷³James H. Ewing and Harry Slep, History of the City of Altoona and Blair County (Altoona: Harry Slep's Mirror Printing House, 1880), 252, quoting Altoona Daily Sun, (July 26, 1880). W. Frank Vaughn, "The Building and Loan Associations," Altoona Mirror (January 15, 1916).

⁷⁴R.L. Polk & Co., 1900 and 1925; Directory of the City of Johnstown (Johnstown: Frank D. Hoerle, 1901). Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 46. Facts About Altoona (Chamber of Commerce, 1948).

⁷⁵Lant, 125.

⁷⁶Altoona Mirror (June 13, 1939). Altoona (Chamber of Commerce, 1925), 18.

⁷⁷Clark, Semi-Centennial, 62-3. Sell, 285-6. Ewing and Slep, 251.

Only in slight contrast to these upper-middle-class houses were those owned by the larger skilled working class and described in 1911 as "mostly frame structures, built singly and in pairs, arranged so that light and air are abundant, and small garden plots are not infrequent."⁷⁸ Despite this optimistic description, much of Altoona's housing stock was built wall-to-wall in identical rows or sets of combinations of a few types, indicating the activity of developers and their contractors. These houses were popular with both individual home builders as well as purchasers. Their pervasiveness in the city is consistent with its reputation as a one-class city of middle-class, skilled workers. Economically these citizens found the houses affordable. And because they had enough stylistic details to be fashionable yet did not flaunt their individuality, they fit the aesthetic and social values of skilled workers aspiring to the middle class.

Populace

The relative social and economic homogeneity of Altoona's population contributed to its sense of ethnic homogeneity. Compared to other industrial cities of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Altoona had a small immigrant population. In 1870, Altoona's foreign-born population was 14 percent; in 1890, 10.2 percent; in 1900, 8.5 percent. This compares with Johnstown's rate of 20.3 percent in 1900. In 1910, Altoona had 5,212 foreign-born people (10 percent of its total), while Johnstown had 15,316 (27.6 percent).⁷⁹

The composition of Altoona's population was used as a selling point by contemporary promotional writers. "The undesirable foreign element," wrote Charles B. Clark in 1896, "so predominant in some cities, is almost entirely absent here. The citizens of foreign birth are mostly German and English, of the educated class, and are among the most respected."⁸⁰ A 1912 program to celebrate the Semi-Centennial of the Loyal War Governors Conference again noted that

a feature of the city's population is the almost entire absence of foreigners of the laboring class, very few of these being found here. This . . . adds greatly to the desirability of the city as a place of residence or a business location.

The same program lists performances by a German singing society, the Concordia, and the Altoona Turngemeinde, a German gymnastics club.⁸¹

Altoona did have a foreign-born population, but, especially in the nineteenth century, its socio-economic status and primarily German and Irish ethnicity allowed it to assimilate fairly easily with an older stock population of much the same composition. Many of those hired to work in the shops were from rural and small town Pennsylvania. Unlike industries that recruited unskilled labor in Europe, the PRR in Altoona sought a skilled work force and occasionally sent agents to Europe to recruit skilled labor.⁸² In the nineteenth century, German and Irish names frequent the pages of the city directories and tax-assessment books. On an 1859 map, a neighborhood along

⁷⁸Sell, 285-6.

⁷⁹U.S. Bureau of the Census.

⁸⁰Clark, Semi-Centennial, 64.

⁸¹The Semi-Centennial Loyal War Governors Conference Official Guide (September 24-26, 1912).

⁸²PRR Directors' Minutes 4 (9/7/1864): 404-05.

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6th Avenue between 5th and 9th streets is called "Hibernia" after its Irish inhabitants.⁸³ An area called "Dutch Hill," named for its German (Deutsch) residents, was located on the East Side. By 1870, four of the fourteen churches in the city were distinctly German, one of the four building and loan associations was German, and a German-language newspaper was published weekly from 1878 to 1918.

By 1911 the population had become somewhat more diverse, but, as historian Jesse Sell explained, the established patterns continued:

All nationalities are represented in this great body of working men. Of the foreign elements the Italians lead in numbers, the Italian population of the city numbering about 5,000. There are large numbers of Germans and Irish; however, both of the latter named elements assimilate so rapidly that they soon lose their identity as foreigners. The so-called "foreigners" of the city are usually intelligent, largely due to the nature of their employment. Great numbers of them are skilled artisans in iron, steel, and wood working. This is especially true of the Germans. . . . Many who have been educated in great industrial schools found abroad are here employed.⁸⁴

Despite the desire to gloss the city into a safely homogenous whole, Altoonans were very much aware of discrepancies in styles and standards of living. As one resident put it, "Altoona was always ethnic and there was a tendency for one group to look down their nose at the next group."⁸⁵

As Sell noted, the largest outgroup were the Italians who, like other twentieth-century immigrants, arrived in greatest numbers in the first two decades of the twentieth century. They settled on the East Side along the base of Prospect Hill, disturbing the contours of "Dutch Hill." One resident of the neighborhood remembered that his German grandparents moved up to Bell Avenue at the crest of Prospect Hill "because there were too many Italians moving into 5th Avenue--they didn't want to be surrounded." Eighth Avenue became the center of a Little Italy. The Altoona Diocese appointed an Italian priest for the immigrants in 1905. In 1911 they purchased a wood-frame store at the corner of 8th Avenue and 11th Street that they converted into a church and school. Construction of a new church for the parish, Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, was begun in 1912 and was finally completed in 1923. A number of Mt. Carmel parishioners settled about a mile to the northeast in Pleasant Valley, and in 1925, a chapel in the former Connellsville Township Elementary School was dedicated to spare residents the walk across the hill to 8th Avenue. In addition to supporting a new church, Altoona's Italian immigrants founded an Italian Bank and a number of social organizations. An Italian consulate serving immigrants in fourteen central Pennsylvania counties was established in Altoona in 1912.⁸⁶

Altoona's black population was always small, but was long-established. The first family settled near Allegheny Furnace in 1834. In 1896 there were two black churches, African Methodist Episcopal and Mount Zion Second Baptist, but their combined membership was only one hundred. In 1925, one estimate was that there were 1,200 blacks in Altoona, but the same newspaper article noted that only fifty voted in the 1924 election. In 1925 only 5 percent owned their own homes; a newspaper noted, apparently without irony, that the building and loan associations were "generous in their treatment" of blacks. In March 1940, the Altoona Mirror reported that

⁸³Map of Blair County, Pennsylvania (Philadelphia: Geil and Freed, 1859; 1983 reprint).

⁸⁴Sell, 286.

⁸⁵Ted Holland, "Ethnogeography of a Railroad Town," (unpublished paper, 1988), 7.

⁸⁶Holland, 3, 9. Our 75 Years Together: Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish and Franciscan Friars T.O.R. (Tappan, NY: Custombook Inc., 1985), 10-19. "Italian Bank to be Opened in Altoona," Altoona Mirror (May 3, 1920); "Italian-American Groups Aid in Advancement of Altoona," (August 12, 1949); "Count Ranuzzi Opens Consulate," (December 3, 1912).

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the housing conditions of the Negroes here, as elsewhere, are far below the standard of average living. . . . Not being able to pay more for rent, they are forced to live under congested conditions

As a solution, the local Community Service Association advocated a federally-funded, low-rent housing project, for "raising of standards . . . is based entirely upon the change of environment and good homes in which to live." Today, Altoona's black population is still small, numbering about 810, or 1.4 percent of the total population.⁸⁷

Twentieth-century immigrants tended to move into unskilled PRR jobs. While city directories listed men with German or Anglo-Saxon surnames as sheet-metal workers or boilermakers, their Italian and East European neighbors appeared more often simply as laborers. East European immigrants settled southwest of the Loudonsville section of Altoona. An Orthodox church was established there by 1916 and St. Mary's Ukrainian Catholic Church was founded by 1920. Chinese immigrants formed an enclave in the Italian neighborhood. One resident remembered that

the Chinese kids would earn money going out and cleaning the stables, the horses that the Italians used to ply their wares. Some of them had jobs in the railroad simply taking care of the stock pens down by 4th Street. They did the lowliest jobs. The first generations of them [in Altoona] were railroad workers, track workers, but eventually they needed fewer and fewer of those as the Italians took over a lot of that work.

A small Mexican population arrived more recently as recruits to offset labor shortages during World War II. They lived in sections of Juniata and East Altoona. Most stayed only for a few years, until their jobs were reclaimed by returning G.I.s.⁸⁸

Labor

In a 1934 brochure, the Altoona Chamber of Commerce noted what it considered the most salable characteristics of the labor situation in the city:

Labor--Highly skilled, intelligent, industrious, loyal and thrifty. More than 90% native white. Unlimited supply available for employment--both male and female. Favorable Labor Conditions.⁸⁹

It was not mere coincidence that the "favorable labor conditions," a euphemistic reference to the absence of a strong union movement in the city, occurred and were listed in conjunction with the attributes cited by earlier boosters. And just as there was another side to their portrayal and perception of Altoona as a one-class, city of homes, it was not true that Altoona's workers were universally content.

The city experienced its most pronounced labor conflict in 1877. Events in Altoona were part of a widespread strike sparked when the B&O and other railroads, including the PRR, reduced wages and cut the size of train crews in efforts to recover from the lingering effects of the 1873 depression. Freight crews at Pittsburgh

⁸⁷Altoona Tribune (January 15, 1916), sec. 2, 13. Clark, Illustrated Altoona, 86. Altoona Mirror, (May 27, 1925); "Living Standard of Negro is Low, Survey Reveals," (March 7, 1940); "Housing Project Would Provide Better Living," (March 20, 1940). U.S. Bureau of the Census.

⁸⁸Holland, 7-8.

⁸⁹Altoona, Pennsylvania Facts and Figures (Chamber of Commerce, 1934).

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struck on July 19 and were followed by fellow employees across the line. The protests in Pittsburgh, the center of 1877 strike activity, resulted in several million dollars in property damage. The Pennsylvania governor called out the state militia and two companies were stationed at Altoona, where "confusion reigned supreme." Strikers there took over the PRR complex and agreed "to protect private and public property"; they allowed passenger cars through but stopped all freight traffic. When trains carrying soldiers to quell the rioters at Pittsburgh began to pass through, several hundred strikers gathered at the station and threw stones and taunts at the soldiers. Eventually some scuffled with the engineers who were ignoring the strike call to run the trains. The Altoona workers were able to stop at least one trainload on its way from Harrisburg. A witness remembered how

the strikers interposed themselves and mingled with the soldiers, finally taking their guns from them, and the strange sight was witnessed of soldiers and strikers marching about the town arm in arm.⁹⁰

The mayor and leading citizens were not confident that the strikers would continue such pacific behavior. The mayor held a public meeting in the Opera House and was authorized to appoint 500 deputies to supplement the police force. On July 25 a grand jury at Hollidaysburg reported

that persons of the number of three or four have, in a tumultuous, disorderly, and riotous manner, with force, stopped the trains running on the Pennsylvania Railroad, and have by threats and violence prevented engineers, firemen, and brakemen from operating trains.

Yet the jury, perhaps betraying its sympathies or merely wanting to keep peace in the community, recommended that their inquiry be discontinued. As justification they pointed out that they could not personally substantiate the charges which were based on "rumor" and on "statements made in the public newspapers" and that "at present there is quiet and order at Altoona."⁹¹

Another contingent of militia succeeded in removing the strikers from their base at the PRR station on July 27. The strike was broken across the country by mid-August; its after-effects would be felt for years to come. Wages on the PRR were not restored to pre-strike levels until 1880. In January 1878 Altoona's Morning Tribune condemned the "unjust war on railroads," and placed its support with pro-business interests in the community. Workers' grievances, the paper argued, were "more fancied than real," for the PRR

has afforded employment and competence to many hundreds of mechanics and humble laboring men, and has paid them with a promptness unsurpassed by any railway in the world. Yet there are men who cannot regard it in any other light than a monster and a tyrant, a fit subject for pillage and arson, simply because it presupposes to know its own business better than its persecutors. Every effort made to crush, wrong or impede our railroad system is so much against the public welfare, commercially and industrially considered.⁹²

As one of the first modern industrial corporations, the PRR initiated a system of management that established definite lines of authority and responsibility. This decentralized line-and-staff form of organization gave immense authority to the superintendents of each geographical division. The chief of motive power, stationed in

⁹⁰Paige, 74-6. Davis, 257-58. Africa, 151. "Oldest Conductor is Robert H. Hamilton," Altoona Tribune, (January 15, 1916), sec. 6., 16.

⁹¹Davis, 257-58. Africa, 151.

⁹²Davis, 257-58. Paige, 74-6. "Unjust War Upon Railroads," Altoona Morning Tribune (January 30, 1878), 2.

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Philadelphia, gave general direction and established standards, but did not supervise workers in the shops.⁹³ Upper-level managers in Altoona reported to two bosses, one related to the chief of motive power and one responsible for the divisions.⁹⁴ Before 1920, the superintendent of motive power was stationed in Altoona. During World War I, the U.S. government seized operations of all railroads; when the railroads were returned to private hands in 1920, the PRR reorganized. Most of the administrative personnel were transferred from Altoona. The Altoona shops then became a separate division under the chief of motive power and were supervised by a works manager.⁹⁵

Within the shops, the foremen of each shop--the machine shop, the carpentry shop, the paint shops, and so on--reported to the master mechanic or master car builder. Each shop was arranged in departments, each with a foreman. Skilled workers (machinists, carpenters, painters, etc.) were organized in gangs; their foremen reported to the department foreman. Laborers were unskilled workers, and lower in status than the laborers were the janitors. In 1873, the piecework system--in which workers were paid by the job instead of the hour--was introduced in Altoona and gradually adapted throughout the shops; by the end of the century, nearly all Altoona workers were paid on this system.⁹⁶

PRR employees assigned to various road crews organized unions or brotherhoods in Altoona in the 1880s. The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen and the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Engineers both received local charters in September 1885. A Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers branch was formed in 1886. The Brotherhoods followed the nineteenth-century pattern of a kind of divisive unionization along craft lines rather than across them and while they did instigate strikes, made gains for their members, and provided beneficial and social organizations, by the early twentieth century, many viewed them as virtual company unions. The shops workers in Altoona remained unorganized until 1934 when they formed the Brotherhood of Railroad Shopcraftsmen of America in response to federal abolition of company unions. The members chose to keep their organization independent of the national union, a member of the American Federation of Labor.⁹⁷

During World War I when the railroads were under government management, wage scales were increased and the eight-hour day was recognized. When the roads were returned to their companies in 1920, a Railroad Labor Board made up of company executives was appointed to mediate disputes and the incremental advances started during the war years were halted. Disputes over representation and pay reductions led to a national shopcrafts strike in 1922 but only a few men in Altoona went out. When the strike ended the national union was weakened; company unions were boosted, but were outlawed in 1934.⁹⁸

During World War II, the Railroad Workers of America, Congress of Industrial Organizations began an

⁹³Stephen Salisbury, No Way to Run a Railroad: The Untold Story of the Penn Central Crisis (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1982), 12. Chandler, 105-06.

⁹⁴The general superintendent of motive power reported to the chief of motive power and the general manager. The superintendent of motive power reported to both the general superintendent (of the divisions) and the general superintendent of motive power. The master mechanic or master car builder reported to the superintendent (of the divisions) and the superintendent of motive power. Watkins, 3:42.

⁹⁵George H. Burgess and Miles C. Kennedy, Centennial History of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company, 1846-1946 (Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania Railroad Company, 1949), 567.

⁹⁶Lloyd Murray, interviewed July 6, 1988. Africa, 182. Fred Pacifico, interviewed January 20, 1989. Watkins, 3:30, 42.

⁹⁷Altoona Mirror (August 6, 1949), 3. Paige, 80-1. Wolf, 365-67.

⁹⁸Anna Shaefer Leopold, "Smoky City," 45-49. Paige, 80-1.

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aggressive organizing campaign in the PRR shops and called a representation election to challenge the shopcrafts Brotherhood. Shop workers across the system were broken down into eight crafts: carmen, machinists, electricians, blacksmiths, sheet-metal workers, powerhouse workers, boilermakers, and moulders. The CIO narrowly won the right to represent general laborers and three of the eight crafts. The AFL called its own challenge election in 1947 but was defeated, and in the subsequent run-off between the CIO and the Brotherhood, the CIO won six of eight shopcrafts. The AFL continued to campaign and won three crafts in a 1949 election. The two national unions ceased their competition when they agreed to merge in 1955.⁹⁹

By World War II there was more sympathy for union organization among Altoona workers. The PRR began closing down its shops in the 1930s as the PRR experienced the same Depression-era losses as the rest of the country; downscaling continued in the 1940s as locomotive technology changed from steam to electric and diesel. The Altoona Mirror noted that so much of the shops closed "that not even the shop whistles were blown regularly." The shops payroll, which was nearly \$21 million in 1928, dropped to \$8.3 million in 1932 and \$6.4 million in 1938.¹⁰⁰

Decline

Despite some war-related work in the early 1940s, the PRR's decline in Altoona continued late into the decade. The last locomotive was constructed there in 1946; the PRR employed 11,939 workers in 1949, down from a peak of 15,000 in the 1920s. Although Altoona continued as a car and locomotive maintenance facility until the 1960s, the new diesel locomotives were estimated to require only 10 percent of the maintenance demanded by steam locomotives. In 1956, the PRR moved its car construction shops to Hollidaysburg, followed later by its car repair shops.¹⁰¹ Today, the Juniata shops remain the railroad's (now Conrail's) principal locomotive-repair facility.

As the PRR declined so did the city of Altoona. During the Depression, five of Altoona's eight banks closed, and most of the building and loan associations went out of business. Mortgages on 2,000 houses were foreclosed, further depressing the real estate market. The responsibilities assumed with the January 1929 annexation of a 4.57-square-mile area around the city would have strained city resources even without the Depression. The new neighborhoods included large areas without adequate sanitary sewage facilities and added miles of unpaved streets. Police and fire departments had to be enlarged and a private water company was purchased to supplement city reservoirs.¹⁰²

The Chamber of Commerce, first organized in 1887 as the Altoona Board of Trade, tried to offset the loss of the PRR's support by attracting new business to the city. One of the earliest efforts at economic diversification resulted in the opening of the Schwarzenbach-Huber Company's silk mill in 1889 at 25th Street and 8th Avenue. By 1916 it employed 875 and a second mill in Juniata employed 300. This enterprise was chosen in part because it employed mostly women, providing jobs for PRR workers' wives and daughters but posing no threat to the PRR's monopoly on the male labor pool. During the flusher times of the 1920s, the Chamber of Commerce turned away businesses rather than have them challenge PRR entrenchment. When World War II failed to revitalize the railroad industry, however, community leaders made more concerted efforts to bring other industry to Altoona. A Sylvania

⁹⁹Leopold, "Smoky City," 54-73.

¹⁰⁰Altoona Mirror (August 6, 1949). Paige, 81.

¹⁰¹Peter H. Stott, "Pennsylvania Railroad Shops," in "Survey of Historic Structures in Blair and Cambria Counties, Pennsylvania," (Historic American Engineering Record, U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1987) draft typescript, 6. Paige, 35-6, 82. The Altoona Story of Industrial Development (Chamber of Commerce, 1956).

¹⁰²Nancy S. Shedd, "First National Bank of Altoona" (typescript, n.d.), 17-18. Altoona Mirror (August 6, 1949), 22.

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Electric plant and a new veterans hospital were established during the war. In 1949 the Chamber of Commerce formed Altoona Enterprises, Inc. Local businesses purchased stock or made donations to the organization which then used the money to help finance start-up costs of new businesses. The Butterick Pattern Plant at 30th Street and Beale Avenue was one of the largest companies attracted under the plan. In 1951 Altoona Enterprises sold a new factory building at cost to SKF Industries, a ball-bearing manufacturer. A second fund-raising drive, the Altoona Industrial Payroll Insurance Plan, was initiated in 1950. Using the slogan "Jobs for Joes," organizers solicited pledges from businesses and individuals. By 1965 it was reported that the campaigns had attracted thirty new and expanded industries and 12,200 jobs.¹⁰³

Yet as late as 1958 unemployment was as high as 15 percent. By 1961 the PRR "barely provided jobs for 6,500 people"--"barely" because much of this employment was part-time with periods of work alternating with prolonged lay-offs. Between union lobbying to save jobs and maintain standards of living and railroad maneuvering to offset labor and maintenance costs, railroad wages were tripled and employment cut in half in the fifteen years after World War II. Altoona's population began to reflect the job outlook; it declined steadily and became older as young adults moved away. In the early 1960s, enough residents had ties with the retirement community of St. Petersburg, Florida, that the Altoona Mirror published a weekly column reporting on Altoonans' activities there. PRR employees with enough seniority to count on being called back from furloughs made accommodations to the erratic work schedules because of the high wages and the prestige and family tradition of working for the railroad.¹⁰⁴

CONCLUSION

In 1952 a reporter for Business Week used a description of Altoona's streetscapes to represent the consequences of being a "one-company town:"

Altoona looks like a railroad town in the worst sense of the word . . . [it] is, to put it kindly, unattractive. . . . Most of [the houses] look as if they haven't seen a coat of paint in many years, and the dirty gray of soft-coal soot has settled on all the buildings in the city.¹⁰⁵

Another reporter saw much the same thing in 1965:

The effort to drag itself out of the pit [of railroad dependency and depression] has left scars. Narrow downtown streets, many unsightly buildings, and congested traffic conditions are monuments to a local tax rate that has deliberately been kept low. Many residential areas have a shabby look about them. Graying frame houses are clustered together along uneven cobbled streets.¹⁰⁶

The explicit association of Altoona's "old" buildings with its history and the cause of its economic depression helps to explain the devastation wreaked by urban renewal projects of the late 1960s and 1970s on the city's center. Many historic buildings were demolished, mostly for the construction of high-rise housing, parking

¹⁰³Leopold, "Smoky City," 16-20. "Altoona's Angle," Business Week (June 4, 1949), 76-82. "One City's War on Poverty," Senior Scholastic 87 (December 9, 1965): 21.

¹⁰⁴"One City's War on Poverty," 21. Leopold, "Smoky City," 107-112.

¹⁰⁵"Altoona: One-Company Town in Search of Industry," Business Week (May 10, 1952), 76-8.

¹⁰⁶"One City's War on Poverty," Senior Scholastic 87 (December 9, 1965), 21.

lots, and highways. But these efforts to remove what were considered eyesores and make the commercial district attractive and accessible by car were doomed to failure by the national trend towards suburbanization. Downtown businesses either closed completely or moved to the Pleasant Valley Shopping Center/Logan Valley Mall strip adjoining the city on the south and east. A mini-strip was created within the city itself with the demolition of all but a few PRR shop buildings and the construction of Station Mall at 9th Avenue and 17th Street. The Chamber of Commerce's latest promotional venture promises at least a partial turn away from the policy of demolition. The city is participating in the state-sponsored Main Street Manager Program, designed to draw attention and activity to the city center through preservation of existing buildings and encouragement of redevelopment that fosters historic character as a commercial asset.

Altoona's residential neighborhoods are no longer shrouded in soot and there are few remaining cobblestone streets. Unfortunately, houses continue to be torn down, often through the city's "blighted properties" program. Altoona still has a few "shabby" residential areas that are often rented as "Section 8" housing and subject to the neglect of owners and developers until it becomes easier to demolish a building than to restore and maintain it. Yet the majority of Altoona's neighborhoods reflect the pride of their residents as homeowners maintain and remodel their houses so that Altoona can still aspire to the title "City of Homes."

The neighborhoods profiled here begin to provide a picture of what that phrase has meant at different times and places in Altoona. From the suburban upper middle class society of Llyswen to the skilled working class urban neighborhood of the Fourth Ward to the more prestigious white collar addresses next to the commercial center in the First Ward, the basis for home building was the railroad. As Chamber of Commerce publications boasted, the skilled labor pool required by the PRR insured a responsible and upstanding populace of "neither the very rich nor the very poor." The varying character of the houses built in each neighborhood reflects the different facet of this populace that each represents and hints at the fissures dividing what has been portrayed as a monolithic whole. The churches, building and loans, and fraternal organizations that these citizens founded and supported are intricately constitutive of the city's built environment.

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W. Glenn and Doris Henninger, residents, 317 Morningside Ave., August 11, 1989.

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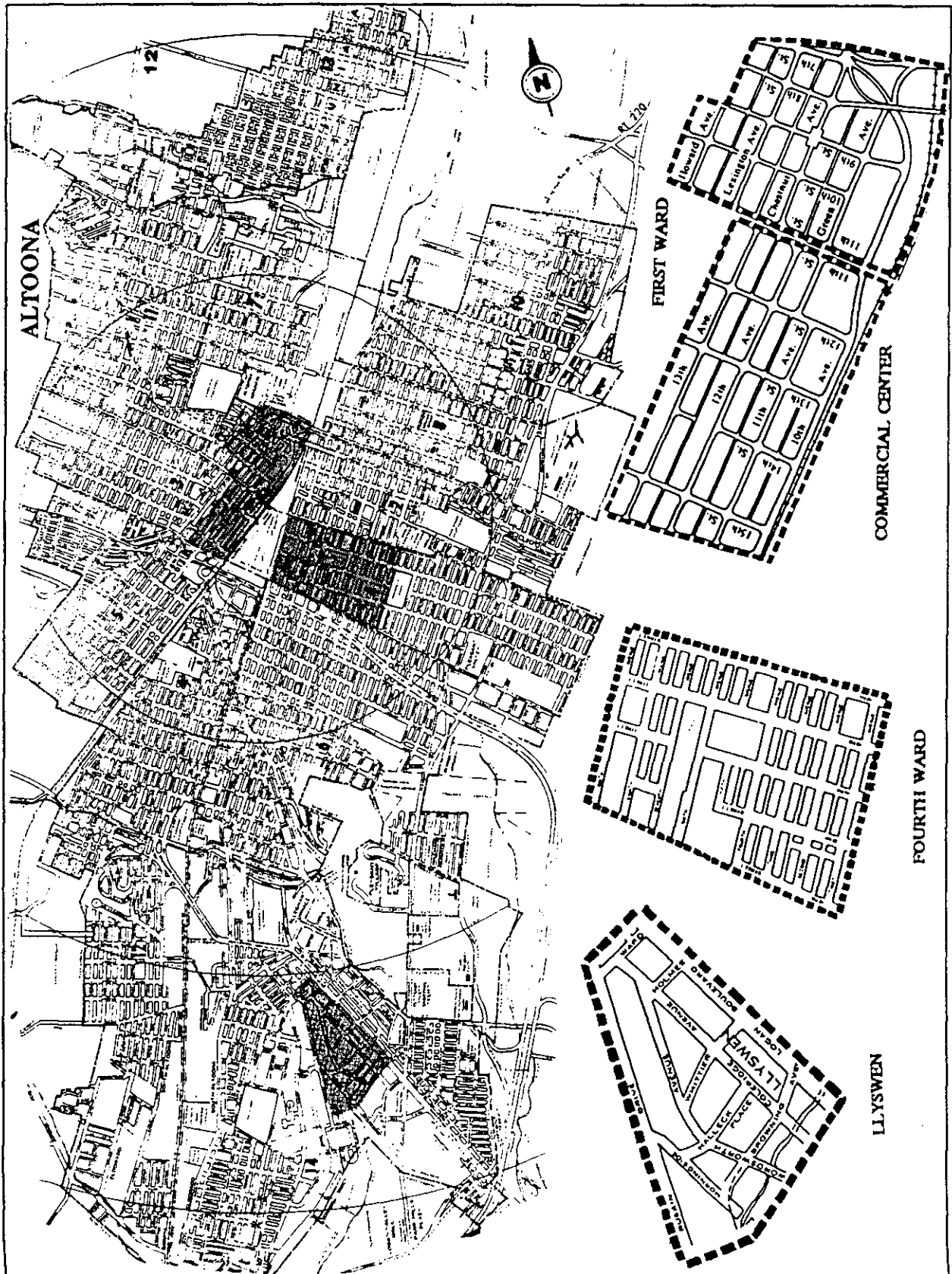
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PROJECT INFORMATION

This report was part of a larger project to document the city of Altoona, Pennsylvania. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), Randy Cooley, director. See additional HABS reports on buildings in the downtown and other neighborhoods.

This report was prepared by Kim E. Wallace, supervisory historian, under the direction of Alison K. Hoagland, HABS historian. Wallace's and other project historians' work was published as Railroad City: Four Historic Neighborhoods in Altoona, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1990), edited by Kim E. Wallace and HABS historian Sara Amy Leach.

Figure 1.1 Map of the City of Altoona, 1983, with insets of the four survey areas



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Figure 1.2 "Altoona, Tuckahoe Valley, Blair County," c. 1855, showing the two halves of the town divided by the railroad yards. From Africa (1883).

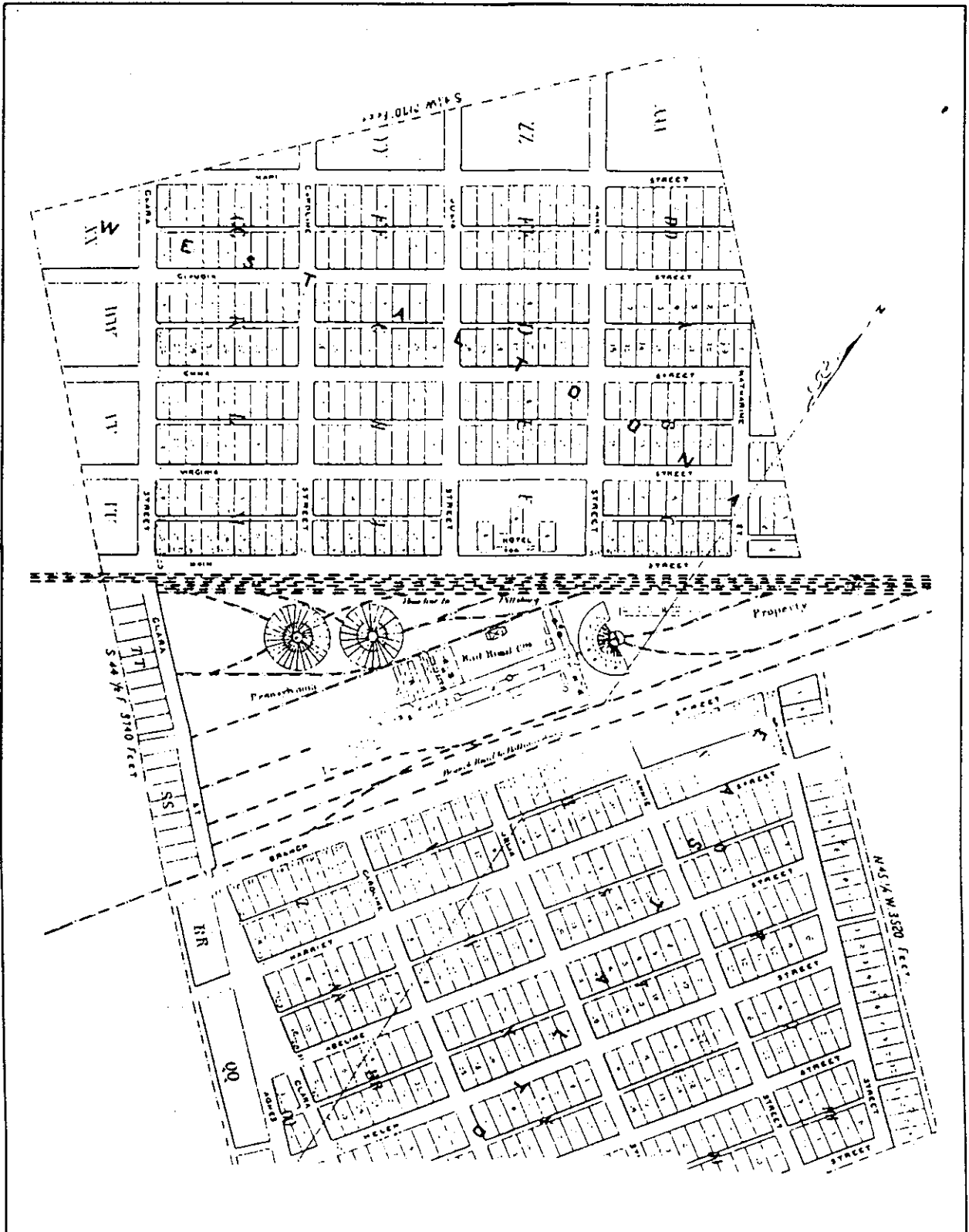
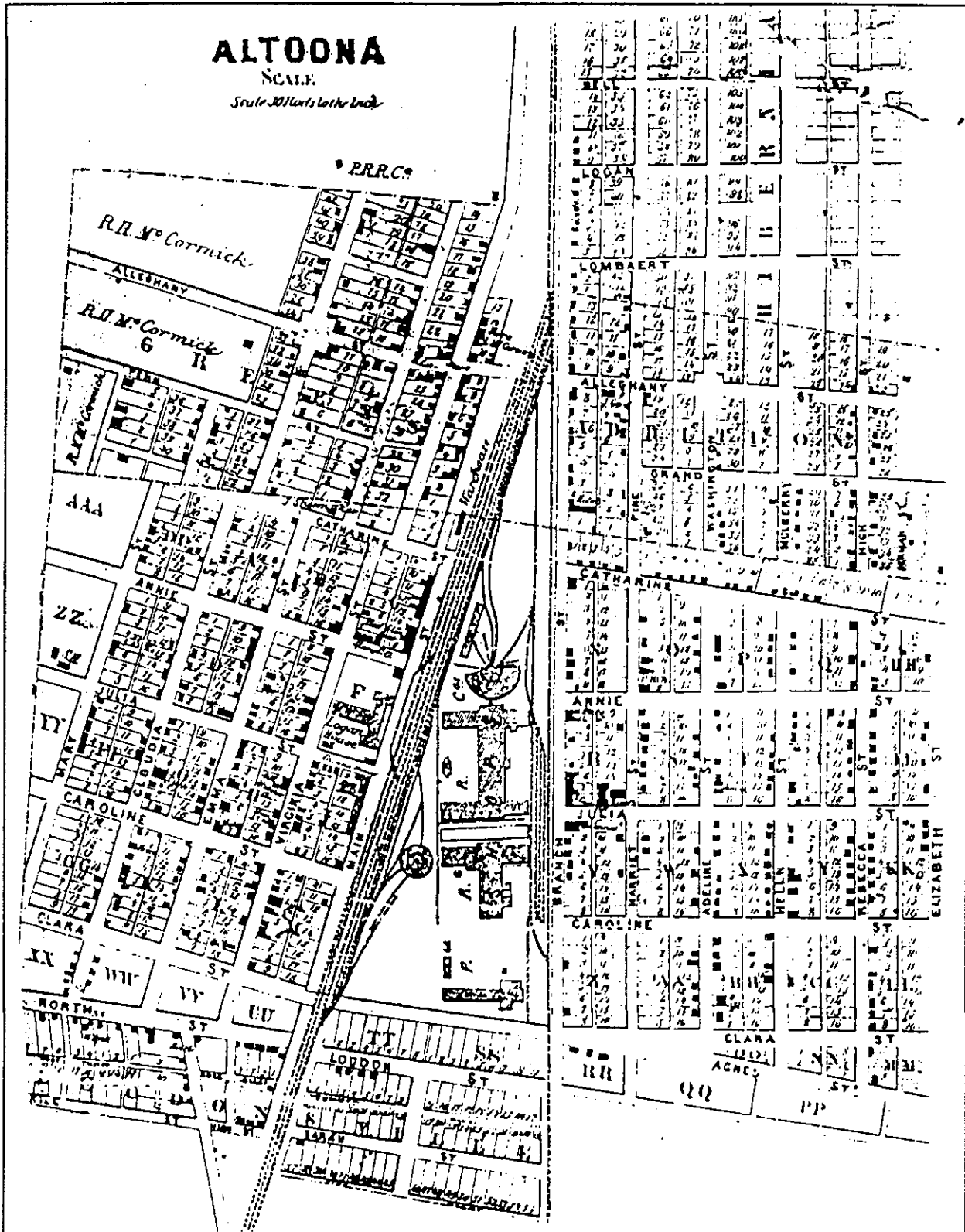


Figure 1.3 Population of Altoona, 1860-1980, U.S. Bureau of the Census.

Population of Altoona			
<u>Year</u>	<u>Total Population</u>	<u>Number of Foreign-born</u>	<u>Percentage Foreign-born</u>
1860	3,510	(not available)	
1870	10,618	1,491	14.0
1880	19,710	2,092	10.6
1890	30,337	3,107	10.2
1900	38,973	3,301	8.5
1910	52,127	5,212	10.0
1920	60,331	5,312	8.8
1930	82,054	5,951	7.3
1940	80,214	2,671	3.3
1950	77,177	3,790	4.9
1960	69,407	2,915	4.2
1970	81,225	1,937	2.4
1980	57,078	990	1.7

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Figure 1.4 "Altoona" from Map of Blair County, 1859, 1983 reprint. Greensburg is the section nearest the top of the page, Loudonsville is at the bottom.



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Figure 1.5 "A Sketch Map of Altoona, Pa.," with neighborhoods labeled, Illustrated Altoona, 1895.

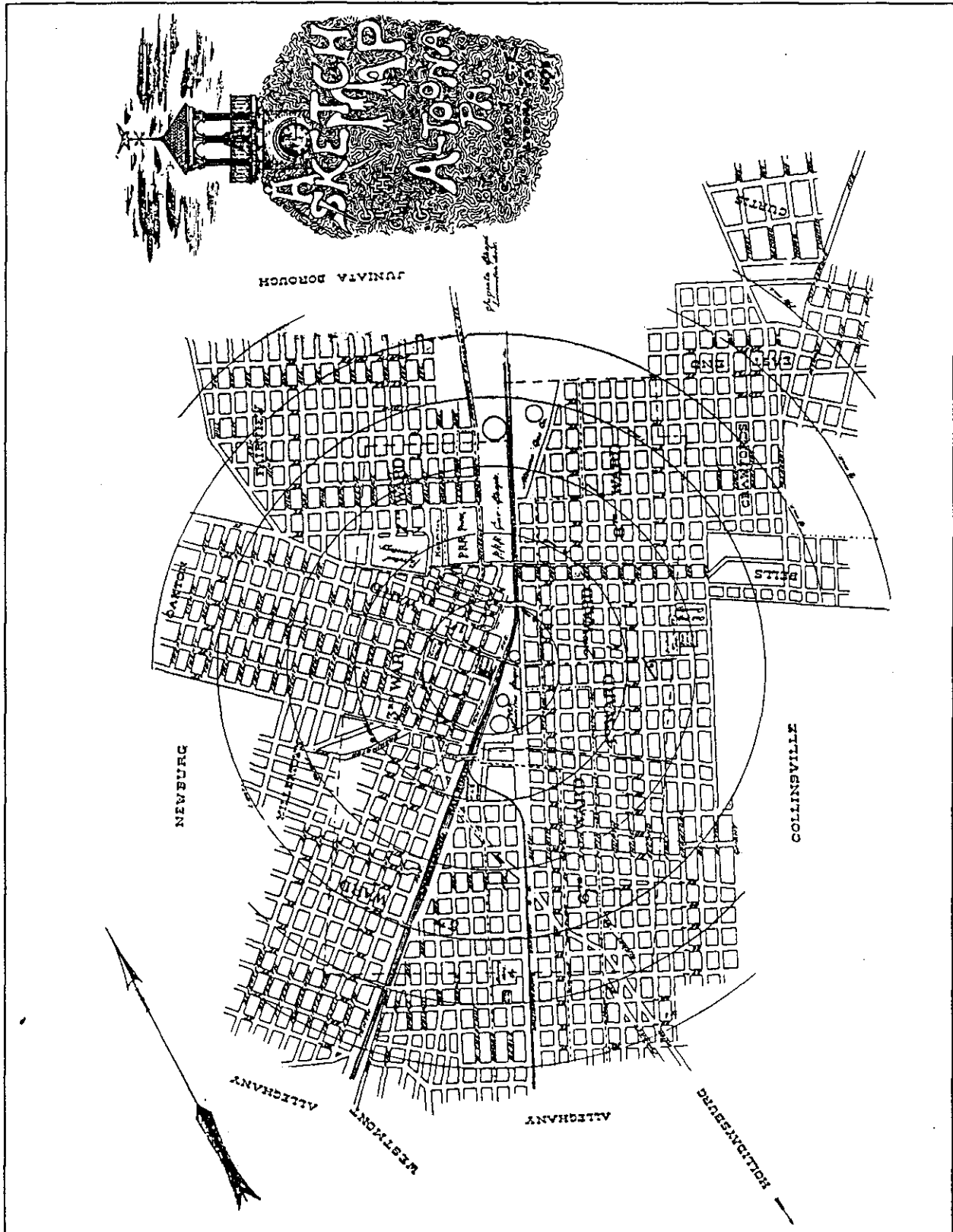


Figure 1.6 Detail of Map of the City of Altoona, 1870, Fairview Cemetary is in the upper right quadrant.

